

## BLOGGING'S IMPACT ON TRADITIONAL NEWS

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Blogging is having a huge impact on traditional news. I believe bloggers are using their posts not only to leak to the media but also to challenge it directly.

Blogs, which is short for web-logs, have been around for about eight or nine years. Some blogs are like a series of diary entries, some are little more than a collection of links to other sites, some are academic, but a lot are mere rants. The best of the blogs have a distinctive, authentic voice, a quality many people find attractive. The growth in blogs is happening at the same time that audiences for mainstream news media are falling. This is reflected in the growing popularity of sites like MySpace.com, Wikipedia, and blogging platforms such as Blogger.com or Livejournal.com.

When the Indian Ocean tsunami hit on December 26, 2004 the mainstream media was largely caught off guard. It was Christmas, when many newsrooms and newspaper publishers were staffed with skeleton teams, and few western media outlets had foreign correspondents already in position to report on the disaster. As the scale of this disaster began to emerge to the world, people were shuffling between their televisions and computers, seeking information. People began blogging, working in real-time with real people revealing the latest, and sometimes the only updated information. The idea that a normal person in the middle of a chaotic situation, can tell the world what is happening is very appealing, and something that blogs can do very well. When it comes to coverage of unfolding news dramas, like the tsunami tragedy, a simple eyewitness can be a far more compelling source of information than a conventional journalist or reporter.

Last September, veteran CBS anchor, Dan Rather was humiliated by conservative bloggers. They were able to show that documents in a '60 Minutes' story undermining George W. Bush's military service record were forged. When Rather resigned soon after, many claimed him as the blogosphere's first high profile scalp. It was a victory for the link-base, comment-driven nature of blogs, coupled with the instantaneous reality of the Internet. Nowhere in this news-breaking story were traditional newsmakers involved.

With blogs you can see the beginning of the story. Whereas journalists and reporters in traditional media, often give their readers and viewers the story as they have seen it. They have gathered the information, and say, "Well this is what happened. This is what we've found." In the blogosphere this is different, because you can link to these actual prime resource documents, you can actually point to where the story has come from, and in this way bloggers are not the center of the story in the same way a traditional journalist or reporter is the center of the story.

Journalists and reporters have always been known as the gatekeepers of the information. These individuals would go to press conferences, read the speeches, and decide what to share and what not to share. What the Internet has changed is that the general public can access the speeches and the press conferences. There is so much information online that we have completely left behind the relationship of journalist as giver of information, reader as passive recipient,

so that in many cases the reader is much more informed than the journalist, or reporter, and bloggers can keep them honest.

Print media around the developed world are in crisis. Papers are looking to the Internet for a lifeline. Traditional newsmakers may now be finding it necessary to join and compete with "other voices" in the media, loosing control of the agenda that it has dictated over for so many years. I believe the difference between the mainstream media and bloggers is that the former has no real relationship with their audience. They still just want to tell us how it is. Bloggers not only listen, but also have the opportunity to respond immediately to the story. For news providers, the ability of consumers to post their own stories and commentaries on events affects their ability to act as a go-to-source of up-to-date information.

In previous years, when subjects of news stories felt they had been misunderstood or badly treated, they were unlikely to take on the reporters or publishers, believing that the power of the press gave the press the final word. The Internet, and especially the amplifying power of blogs, is changing this. Unhappy subjects discovered a decade ago that they could use their Web sites to correct the record or deconstruct articles to expose what they perceived as a journalist's bias or wrong directed narration. But now bloggers are going a step further. Subjects of newspaper articles and news broadcasts now fight back with the same methods reporters use to generate articles and broadcasts- taping interviews, gathering e-mail exchanges, taking notes on phone conversations- and publishing them on their own Web sites. This new weapon in the media wars is shifting the center of gravity in the way that news is gathered and presented and it carries implications for the future of traditional news.

The power of blogs is exponential: blog posts can be linked and replicated instantly across the Web, crating a snowball effect that often breaks through to the mainstream media. Moreover, blogs have a longer shelf life than most traditional news media articles. A newspaper reporter's original article is likely to disappear from the free Web site after a few days and become inaccessible unless purchased from the newspaper's archives, while the blogger's version of events remains available forever. The Tsunami story proves that we are now living in the age of "citizen media" in action. It shows that away from the official, professional mediums we have- press, radio, and satellite television- blogs have become a very important way of putting the opinion of the ordinary citizen out to the world. We are living a " first time event" where views, ideas, and statements are no longer given to us through filtered channels of communication. Of course, this does not mean we should abandon traditional news, but it does mean there is now room for, alternative, objective, and nonbiased news coming from other sources.

Blogs are impacting the world, and making a difference by pulling traditional news service towards a more open public information system. The market will determine who gets heard the most. Bloggers are quick and continue to refine and specialize their skills, while the mainstream media are slower to break a story, but will often responsibly hold back until the facts are clear. I believe the future belongs to the media that combines the best of both worlds.

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